

research snapshot

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Youth Homelessness in Canada

What is this research about?

Youth homelessness is a nation-wide problem in Canada. Every evening, there are thousands of street-involved youth who depend on access to shelters, streets or the homes of others because of homelessness. Canada also lacks a nation-wide study or response to youth homelessness. The number of street-involved youth will continue to grow without a plan to provide immediate and transitional support and resources in Canada. The economic cost will also grow as a result of youth living on the street, with other related costs in health care, criminal justice, social services and emergency shelters.

What did the researchers do?

The three-year research project began in 2006, with a national goal to break the cycle of youth homelessness in Canada. The researchers tracked and described the experiences of 689 street-involved youth in Calgary, Toronto and St. John's. They also referred to service providers and other experts in the field of youth homelessness for feedback on their research findings.

The researchers also outlined three critical elements that would need to be addressed in future efforts to address the needs of street-involved youth. These elements informed their own recommendations towards a solution to youth homelessness. These were:

1. Prevention

What you need to know:

In order to reduce youth homelessness, a variety of services and stakeholders must work together to build stable, specific and uninterrupted supports for street-involved youth.

In order to reduce the impact of triggers that lead youth to become street-involved, family related issues and system reforms are needed. Many street-involved youth run away or are kicked out of their homes, including a growing number of LGBTQ youth. Child protection, education and the justice systems also function in a way that reduces a young person's access to stable living. This pushes them further into street-involved activities. Culturally relevant strategies are also vital, like in the case of Aboriginal youth.

2. Emergency Response

It is important to address the immediate needs of street-involved youth in order to bring stability into their lives. This includes the creation of more youth-specific shelters, improving access to services and food, more outreach, taking on mental health needs and harm reduction support for these youth.

3. Transitions out of homelessness

Street-involved youth need a variety of support in their transition from homelessness, in order to integrate with mainstream society. Their needs include more supportive housing, distinct support services for LGBTQ youth, Aboriginal youth and

those with mental health and addiction issues. More follow up and long-term supports are also needed. There needs to be more coordination between support services to meet these distinct needs, and an evaluation plan in Canada to measure severity of youth homeless in the country. Research, community based responses and strategic responses from community boards and city governments would also be useful to address the needs of street-involved youth.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers recommended that:

- There is a need for more secure, long term funding that is flexible to support street-involved youth programs.
- Street-involved youth need “one-stop” barrier-free access to services at a local level.
- More programs are needed that target early school leavers, and that provide education and grant opportunities.
- Street-involved youth need more job training and work opportunities, especially after completing agency programs.
- A national housing strategy should be developed, and include a plan for youth-specific housing.
- In order to build self-esteem and life skills, more mentoring programs should be created for street-involved youth.
- All levels of government must collaborate to develop a nation-wide plan on youth homelessness.
- A strategy should be made to include the private sector in creative solutions towards reducing youth homelessness.
- Specific government policy should be made to address the distinct and complex needs of street-involved youth.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers and service providers may find this research the most useful. Policymakers may consider the emphasis made by the study to develop specific

policy responses that address the needs of street-involved youth. This may include creating a network of stakeholders that can help inform a plan to combat youth homelessness on both local and nation-wide scales.

Service providers may also consider this research useful to address existing gaps for street-involved youth. The study also sheds some insight on areas of advocacy on behalf of street-involved youth and their distinct needs from a homelessness strategy.

About the Researchers

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To learn more about the Canadian Urban Institute, go to: www.canurb.org

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